



Testimony of Hartford HealthCare
Submitted to the Appropriations Committee
Thursday, February 23, 2016

HB 7027, An Act Making Adjustments to state Expenditures for the Fiscal Year
ending June 30, 2019, and Making Appropriations Therefor.

Good Evening Senator Formica, Senator Osten and Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Patricia Rehmer, and I am President of the Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network and I am also a former Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

I am speaking today in opposition to the Governor's recommended changes to the Department of Mental Health and Addictions 2018-19 budget. Behavioral health has increasingly become an integral health service in systems of care, a critical component of assessing patients' health needs and providing them with the best course of care to ensure their long-term well-being. In recent years especially, there has been a growing awareness and appreciation for the role that behavioral health plays in chronic health care issues that contribute to higher costs. In my view, any cuts to funding that supports behavioral health services would be detrimental to patients as well as the systems that provide these important services.

The most obvious reason that so many people are becoming aware of the importance of behavioral health services is the ongoing national epidemic in heroin and opioid abuse. This epidemic shows no signs of letting up, with approximately 800 people dying of drug-related overdoses in Connecticut in 2016, which is sadly a state record. At a time when this epidemic is impacting all corners of our communities, any attempt to reduce the number of inpatient beds and other services for mental health and substance abuse services would, again, be detrimental to those who are most in need. Within the Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network, which provides services at locations across the state, bed occupancy rates run at over 99 percent all of the time. Reducing the funding for these beds would mean fewer people receiving the care they need to get into recovery.

Another important point I want to raise is the impact this bill would have on community services and the infrastructure we have in place for those suffering from mental health and substance abuse disorders. As someone who believes strongly in the power of recovery, I know how important it is for those in recovery to have access to services that set them on a course for living independently, including jobs and housing. One of the organizations that provides services within Hartford HealthCare's network is Rushford, which is a designated Local Mental Health Authority for the Meriden area, providing mental health services with grant funding provided by the state Department of Mental Health and Addiction

Services. Any cuts in this funding would be detrimental to Rushford's ability to serve as a safety net for people with mental health and substance abuse disorders in those communities.

In closing, I would express my concern that these cuts in funding could well undermine much of the progress that has been made in recent years in addressing the discrimination faced by those with mental health and substance abuse disorders. The resources at our disposal to treat these populations of patients have gone far in educating the public that mental health and substance abuse disorders are clinical conditions that be effectively managed and treated, not a mark of personal failing. For this reason, maintaining these levels of resources is critical.

Thank you for your time and consideration.